622 with a triple aggal of gold thread above his flowered silk head-dress,
291 or kufieyh. His sandals were likewise embroidered with gold thread, and he wore his ceremonial gold sword and curved *hangar*. His three sons, aged six, ten and twelve, were similarly dressed, whilst the nobles, although garbed more simply, managed to create an air of affluence. One marked difference was that the sheikh's beard was luxuriously oiled, combed and scented, whereas the beards of his courtiers were ragged, unkempt and rather dirty.

622 Closely guarded by a ruffianly gang of armed thugs, the sheikh,
342 after embracing us, took us into the inner courtyard. This was a plain, unfurnished room with a floor of black and white marble squares, where the sheikh, his sons, and the Khan Bahadur, an old
[516] friend of ours, whose name was Abdur bin Razzak, removed their sandals prior to entering the throne room. As Europeans entering an Arab house do not remove their shoes, it being considered beneath their dignity to do so (although in reality the practice has a religious basis and would, therefore, have no meaning for an infidel), we followed the royal party after divesting ourselves of our hats. These, together with our torches, we were advised by Abdur bin Razzak to keep in our possession, otherwise they might be difficult to recover afterwards!

[353] The throne room was a long, bare apartment with undecorated, distempered walls broken only by a frieze of the inevitable Moorish pattern. The floor was covered with exquisite Persian rugs, and at the end of the room were half a dozen chairs of Victorian Gothic design covered with purple cushions. It takes a long time to sit
516 down in an Arab house. It is customary for the host to make the pretence of motioning the guest to a chair; the guest is expected to refuse the invitation and, in turn, to motion the host to his own chair. When there are several guests, this absurd ritual of gesticulation can continue for several minutes. Eventually the sheikh settled himself in the largest chair, or throne, and we arranged ourselves in order of precedence on either side of him. Since Captain
000 Bird was the only one who spoke Arabic at all fluently, and Abdur bin Razzak the only Arab present who spoke any English, conversation with the sheikh and his sons had to be conducted through these two intermediaries. I have often suspected later that the eldest son, Abdul, had quite a useful command of English, but he never showed the slightest sign of understanding a word that we said. When I got to know him better, however, and found out

it, and as a result it had got clogged and fouled. One day he fired it off in a moment of exuberance and the barrel burst about eight inches from the muzzle. I took the damaged weapon to the R.A.F. armourer's shop and got him to saw the top part of the barrel off. Thus shortened, it made an excellent short-range weapon, effective at 200 yards, though it went off with a violent explosion and had a recoil like an elephant gun. In addition to the .303, Sparkes had brought a Webley, and Cranley a Colt automatic. Thus for several minutes we amused ourselves by taking shots at a stake we had fixed in the ground fifty yards away, to the applause and amusement of a group of Arab labourers from the date plantations.

Five camels approached our resting place from the other side of the creek, and through my Zeiss glasses I saw that one of the two riders was the Khan Sahib. As soon as he rode up, he explained that he had hired them from a nearby village and suggested that we should proceed to Mahrid on the backs of these scraggy-looking beasts. I had never ridden a camel before, and was not encouraged by the venemously sly look which the leading she-camel gave me; she had a rich fawn coat, bared in patches around her scrawny haunches by distemper, and she chewed viciously at her bridle with yellow teeth. However, I crawled on to her back, Cranley scrambling up behind me, and the rest of the party followed suit. Suleman Beg was left in charge of the truck. The caravan then started the journey to Mahrid. The owner of the camels, who took the lead, set off at a loping canter which I found most uncomfortable when I tried to emulate him. After a few miles I began to feel rather sick, and was glad when, an hour and a half later, the little seaport of Mahrid hove into sight. When I jumped off my steed I began to scratch violently, for the camel's hair was infested with fleas.

The Khan Sahib sent one of his seamen back to the battle-wagon with tins of petrol, which the men carried on top of their heads, and invited us inside his house. It was a cool plaster building of typical Arab design, with glassless windows protected by iron bars. A large, iron-studded teak gate led into an open courtyard, with stone steps leading up to the main living room on the left wing. This was a barely furnished chamber, with Shiraz rugs on the floor, a solitary Turkish inlaid table, and some wooden benches. We sat down and gratefully imbibed glasses of cool sherbet, enjoying the sea breeze that blew in through the windows. Arab children in the village street peered through the grating at us, begging, as they invariably do, for baksheesh, until the Khan Sahib, uttering a 'roh, zitar', sent them scampering away.

at Sharjah creek, and was formally entertained by the sheikh once a month, I seldom had the opportunity of visiting the town itself. Smaller and less scattered than Dubai, Sharjah is typically Arabian, and the plain, square houses of the merchants, built of whitewashed juss, bear a strange resemblance to the 'functional' houses publicized so much in the architectural press. They are based on a simple plan; in the centre is the courtyard, with the living quarters on one side, and the sleeping apartments on the other. They are seldom higher than two storeys, but an appearance of height is given to them by the tall, square wind-towers, or Persian ventilators, which circulate cool draughts of air throughout the house during even the hottest days.

A long covered corridor usually runs at the back of the house, linking the living and sleeping quarters, and behind this are the kitchen and lavatories. The two wings are also joined at the front of the house by a full-length veranda, where the owner and his family sit in the evenings, drinking their sherbet or coffee. A rug or coco-nut matting, a few plain teak chairs, or perhaps a small tiled table, complete the furnishing of the average living room; the bedrooms are even more sparsely furnished, with little more than the canvas charpoy, or Indian bed, although many Arabs prefer to sleep on a rug on the floor.

It was during one of my occasional visits to Sharjah that I met Hassan bin Ahmidfa, the young son of a pearl merchant; his house is on the edge of the creek and is one of the largest and most elaborate in Sharjah, and furnished in the Turkish style. The huge doors leading to the courtyard are of unvarnished sandalwood, exquisitely carved with fabulous beasts and the conventional floral designs one sees on Kermani rugs. Hassan, who speaks flawless English, received part of his education at Bombay University, where he studied literature and economics, an unusual combination. He is very interested in Western culture and politics and extremely well-informed on most subjects.

Our conversations ranged from a discussion on Shaw to Schopenhauer and Kant, both of whose philosophies he found untrue and pessimistic; he could not agree that what the former called 'the world of ideas' had no objective existence apart from our sensory-perceptions of it, and argued that man could not attain happiness without realism. For an Oriental, Hassan was strangely materialistic, although it must not be assumed that the average Arab is a mystic; he is probably less so than the average German.

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

perfume and tobacco. He then took us by the hand and led us through the courtyard into the guest chamber. A terrace of black marble steps led up to it, through a little brass-studded door, which he unlocked. The chamber was a typical Arab interior. Shiraz and Turkish rugs covered the stone floor, and the furniture consisted of a Moorish-type table, inlaid with mother-o'-pearl, a cane settee, and a few plush-seated chairs. The walls, however, were not plain as were those of Sheikh Sultan's palace; leather saddles of sheepskin, decorated with red wool fringes, hung from iron hooks; there were numerous photographs of the sheikh and his relatives, as well as a small armoury. This included an old flintlock gun, a German Mauser pistol (presented to the sheikh by King Ibn Saud, from whom he bought his horses), a .22 Martini rifle, and a long hiltless battle sword in a black leather scabbard, richly decorated with bands of damascened gold.

Raschid showed us his armoury with great pride, and explained in detail the history of each exhibit. He then took the battle sword from the wall; it was at least five feet in length and, as he withdrew the blade from the scabbard, he gave it a quick twist with his wrist. The blade shivered and sang like a tuning fork. I tried to do the same but the sword was exceedingly heavy to handle and I failed to get any 'tune' out of it. Raschid told us that the sword was forged for his ancestors at Damascus four hundred years ago, and was a sword of honour. It had been used in battle, as a two-handed weapon, and was reputed to have slain a hundred men.

The sheikh's little son, Abdul bin Hamid, wore a curved Muscat dagger of great beauty, the scabbard and hilt being of chased gold. We sat on cushions on the floor, and were joined by the sheikh's elder son, aged eleven, and a four years' old girl, a black-eyed little mite with pigtails, who was evidently a great favourite of the sheikh's. She wore a little tunic of silk taffeta, richly embroidered short silk trousers and sandals of gazelle skin; her bare ankles were covered with silver rings. She looked thoroughly spoiled, and had the manner of an autocrat, screaming sh..illy at her brother whenever he dared to touch her rag doll.

Hussein, the wazir, entered the chamber with a secretary and some other relatives of the sheikh, including an elderly uncle from Baraimi, and after we had exchanged greetings and washed our hands in the silver bowl, slaves were summoned to bring in the dinner. It was rather early for a meal, and we had not long since